

CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

WALTER M. DICKIE, M. D., Director

Weekly Bulletin



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EDITOR

Health Examinations Before Marriage

PREMARITAL EXAMINATIONS AND BLOOD TESTS

Every man and woman marrying in California on and after September 19, 1939, must present to the county clerk a certificate signed by a physician before a marriage license is issued. The certificate will state that an examination, including a standard blood test, has been made and that, in the opinion of the physician, the person is not infected with syphilis or is not in a stage of that disease which may become communicable to the marital partner. The examination and blood test must be made not more than thirty days before a marriage license is issued.

The law was passed by the California legislature to protect the health of persons marrying in this state and to prevent an infected mother from giving her baby syphilis before it is born.

Syphilis hides by imitating other diseases. In many cases, early symptoms are so slight as to go unnoticed by the infected person. Only a physical examination and a blood test will reveal that the disease is present.

How the law works

1. The applicant for a marriage license consults a physician for an examination and blood test. The physician sends a specimen of blood to a laboratory.
2. The laboratory makes a confidential report of the result of the test to the physician and to the California State Department of Public Health and transmits to the physician the certificate form.

3. The physician completes the certificate form and gives it to the applicant.
4. The applicant gives the certificate form to the county clerk who then issues the marriage license.

Where can I get an examination and blood test?

You may be examined by your family physician, by doctors working in free clinics for the control of venereal diseases, by the medical staff of state and local public hospitals, or through arrangements made with your local health department.

The examination will include a blood test. The doctor making the examination may send the blood specimen to an approved private laboratory, to the free local public health laboratory or, if there is no local public health laboratory in your county, to the free state laboratory for a test.

When should I have the examination done?

It may be made either before or after applying to a county clerk for a marriage license. The examination and blood test must be made not more than thirty days before the day the marriage license is issued.

How accurate are blood tests?

The modern blood test for syphilis done by a competent laboratory is very accurate. Only a physician can interpret a blood test. In case there is any

question about the result of the test, the state laboratory is required to make a check.

How soon can I know the results of my test?

That depends upon where you live. If the laboratory is in your city, the physician should know the result the day after the blood is sent to the laboratory. If the blood has to be sent to another city, or to the state laboratory in Berkeley, it may take as long as a week depending upon the distance you live from the laboratory. The results of the test may be doubtful and it may be necessary to have another test made before the physician can make a decision. You should allow plenty of time.

Will a blood test always reveal syphilis?

No. Blood does not become positive to a test until about six weeks after infection. Only a physician's examination will reveal syphilis if it is present in this early stage. For the protection of your own health and for the sake of the person you intend to marry, it is important that you be completely honest and frank with the doctor.

If I have syphilis will I be prevented from marrying?

No. If you have received sufficient treatment, you can not give the disease to the person you marry and the physician will give you a certificate. The result of your blood test does not, in itself, determine if syphilis is in an infectious stage. You may have a four plus Wassermann and yet not be able to transmit syphilis because you have had sufficient treatment to make you noninfectious. Only a physician can tell if there is danger that you may infect another person.

If I have syphilis which is noninfectious, am I cured?

No. Although you may marry with safety, you are not necessarily cured. The amount of treatment necessary to make you noninfectious is not sufficient to prevent the further progress of the disease and the crippling late stages which so often occur. Your doctor will tell you how much more treatment is necessary. This will depend upon the kind and amount of treatment you have had in the past, the length of time you have had syphilis, and other factors.

In the case of women, who have had syphilis, additional precautions must be taken during pregnancy. Most physicians agree that no matter how much treatment the expectant mother has had, it is wise for her to be treated during pregnancy. This is done to insure the birth of a healthy baby, even if the expectant mother has been pronounced cured in the past.

Suppose the doctor refuses to give me a certificate?

Then it will not be possible for you to marry in California until you have had enough treatment to make you noninfectious, unless both of you obtain a court order. The amount of treatment necessary varies with different patients and must be left to the judgment of your physician.

You should start treatment at once. If you are unable to pay the full price for treatment, the State Department of Public Health will furnish your doctor with free drugs so he can treat you at reduced rates. In many places in California there are free clinics for the treatment of patients who can not afford private care. You can obtain a list of them from your physician, from your local health officer, or from the State Department of Public Health.

What shall I tell the person I want to marry?

Ask your physician to discuss your case with your fiancé. If the person you intend to marry is understanding, the marriage will not be wrecked but will only be postponed. There is a much better chance for a happy marriage if there is a mutual understanding before the ceremony than if one of the persons brings infection into the marriage relationship.

What about persons who come to California from other states to marry?

They must have certificates, too. If it is more convenient to be examined in their own state, they can write to the California State Department of Public Health for a certificate form. This form should be given to the physician who makes the examination and takes the specimen of blood. The physician then sends the form with the blood specimen to the state laboratory in the state in which the applicant lives. The laboratory fills in a portion of the form with the required information and returns it to the physician with the results of the test. The laboratory reports the result of the test to the California State Department of Public Health. After the physician has completed the certificate, it can be presented to any county clerk in California and a marriage license will be issued if other provisions of the marriage laws are complied with.

If the examination is made in another state, the blood test must be made in the state laboratory of that state. Certificates signed by representatives of private or local public health laboratories in other states will not be accepted.

Will the results of the examination and blood test be public?

No. Results of your examination and blood test are confidential. They are not part of any public record. The law provides:

"Certificates, laboratory statements or reports, applications and court orders, * * * and the information therein contained, shall be confidential and shall not be divulged to or open to inspection by any person other than state or local public health officers or their duly authorized representatives.

"Any person who shall divulge such information or open to inspection such certificates, statements, reports, applications or court orders, without authority, to any person not by law entitled to the same shall be guilty of a misdemeanor."

The certificate which you present to the county clerk will not reveal if you have syphilis. It will merely state that, in the opinion of the physician, "This person is not infected with syphilis or is not in a stage of that disease which may become communicable to the marital partner." The certificate will be filed by the county clerk. It will not be attached to your marriage license.

If you have syphilis, neither the county clerk nor the person performing the ceremony will know you are infected unless you tell them.

Can I marry without having an examination and blood test?

Under certain circumstances. The judge of the superior court in the county in which the license is to be issued is authorized upon joint application of both parties to a marriage to waive the requirements as to medical examinations, laboratory tests and certificates. He may order the county clerk to issue the marriage license if all other requirements of the marriage laws have been complied with, and if the judge is satisfied by affidavit or other proof that an emergency or other sufficient cause for such action exists and that the public health and welfare will not be injuriously affected. The order of the court shall be filed with the county clerk in lieu of the physician's certificate.

Can I marry if a physician's certificate is refused?

Under certain circumstances. If a physician's certificate is refused because one or both persons desiring to marry have syphilis in a communicable stage, both persons wishing to marry may make joint application to a judge of the superior court in the county in which they are to be married. The judge may order the county clerk to issue the license if all other requirements of the marriage laws have been

complied with, and if the judge is satisfied by affidavit or other proof than an emergency or other sufficient cause for such an order exists, and the public health and welfare will not be injuriously affected. The order of the court shall be filed by the county clerk in lieu of the certificate form.

In every such case, the clerk of the court shall transmit to the California State Department of Public Health a transcript of the record and the order thereon for such follow-up by public health authorities as is required by law or is deemed necessary by the state health director.

Are the court proceedings public?

The court when it is deemed necessary may, to the extent authorized by law or rules of the court, order all proceedings instituted to obtain a court order to marry without a physician's certificate to be confidential and private.

Is there any charge for a court order?

No. The law provides that there be no fee charged for court proceedings instituted to obtain a court order to marry without a physician's certificate.

Where can I obtain further information?

From your family physician, your local health officer or by writing the Bureau of Venereal Diseases, State Department of Public Health, at the State Building, San Francisco, or at the State Building, Los Angeles.

NEW APPOINTMENTS AMONG HEALTH OFFICERS

Dr. Harold R. Hennessey, Yuba City, has been appointed health officer of Sutter County, such appointment to become effective July 1, 1939. He succeeds Dr. Francis P. Wisner. Sutter County is joined with Yuba County in the establishment of a full-time county health unit. Dr. Hennessey will serve as health officer of both counties under the consolidation.

Dr. Lloyd N. Tarr has been appointed city health officer of Taft, to succeed Dr. Oran Newton.

L. Stanford Scott has been appointed city health officer of Redding, to succeed Mr. Bernard E. Gilmore.

INFESTED FLOUR

In cooperation with the U. S. Food and Drug Administration, a lot of 13,000 pounds of flour was located and quarantined, pending seizure by the U. S. Marshal.

MORBIDITY

Complete Reports for Following Diseases for Week Ending
June 24, 1939

Chicken Pox

425 cases: Alameda County 1, Alameda 5, Berkeley 1, Oakland 17, San Leandro 3, Butte County 1, Fresno County 1, Inyo County 1, Kern County 4, Los Angeles County 30, Alhambra 4, Burbank 3, Culver City 1, Glendale 1, Long Beach 2, Los Angeles 56, Pasadena 3, San Fernando 4, San Gabriel 2, San Marino 1, Santa Monica 1, Whittier 2, Lynwood 1, Monterey Park 6, Bell 1, Marin County 1, Mariposa County 6, Alturas 44, Pacific Grove 3, Orange County 4, Anaheim 3, Santa Ana 2, Seal Beach 1, Roseville 10, Corona 3, Riverside 1, San Jacinto 2, Sacramento 15, San Diego County 3, Escondido 3, National City 14, San Diego 18, San Francisco 26, San Joaquin County 9, Manteca 3, Stockton 10, San Mateo County 2, Redwood City 1, San Mateo 6, Santa Barbara County 5, Santa Barbara 2, Santa Maria 1, Santa Clara County 2, Palo Alto 1, San Jose 26, Shasta County 1, Solano County 3, Petaluma 1, Stanislaus County 4, Tulare County 3, Santa Paula 1, Yuba County 33.

Diphtheria

24 cases: Fresno County 1, Imperial County 1, Los Angeles County 4, Los Angeles 9, Sacramento County 1, San Francisco 3, Stockton 1, San Mateo 1, Santa Clara County 1, San Jose 2.

German Measles

15 cases: Alameda 1, Bakersfield 1, Los Angeles County 1, Los Angeles 4, Pomona 1, Hawthorne 1, Orange County 1, Santa Ana 1, San Diego County 1, National City 1, Vallejo 1, Stanislaus County 1.

Influenza

25 cases: Los Angeles County 5, Glendale 2, Los Angeles 9, Orange County 1, San Diego 2, San Mateo County 5, Ventura 1.

Malaria

11 cases: Los Angeles 3, Riverside County 1, Stanislaus County 1, Modesto 1, Tulare County 2, Visalia 2, Winters 1.

Measles

1072 cases: Alameda 1, Berkeley 3, Oakland 6, Butte County 1, El Cerrito 2, El Dorado County 5, Placerville 2, Fresno County 11, Fresno 24, Humboldt County 1, Brawley 1, Inyo County 8, Los Angeles County 125, Alhambra 41, Arcadia 2, Burbank 9, Claremont 2, Compton 11, Culver City 4, El Monte 4, El Segundo 1, Glendale 12, Huntington Park 6, Long Beach 29, Los Angeles 210, Monrovia 1, Montebello 2, Pasadena 12, Pomona 8, San Gabriel 5, San Marino 1, Santa Monica 23, South Pasadena 2, Sierra Madre 1, Whittier 1, Lynwood 4, Hawthorne 2, South Gate 3, Monterey Park 11, Signal Hill 1, Maywood 2, Bell 1, Marin County 4, Mariposa County 1, Gustine 1, Merced 1, Modoc County 3, Alturas 6, Monterey County 11, King City 2, Monterey 2, Salinas 8, Orange County 10, Anaheim 11, Fullerton 4, Santa Ana 8, Seal Beach 1, La Habra 1, Laguna Beach 8, Roseville 16, Plumas County 4, Beaumont 1, Corona 28, Elsinore 13, Riverside 1, San Jacinto 5, Sacramento 27, Ontario 6, San Diego County 59, Chula Vista 19, Escondido 7, Le Mesa 3, National City 6, Oceanside 10, San Diego 29, San Francisco 4, San Joaquin County 8, Lodi 2, Stockton 31, Tracy 4, San Luis Obispo County 1, Paso Robles 2, San Luis Obispo 1, San Mateo County 1, Burlingame 1, San Mateo 6, Santa Barbara County 22, Santa Barbara 22, Santa Clara County 8, Mountain View 1, Santa Cruz County 1, Solano County 2, Vacaville 1, Sonoma County 8, Santa Rosa 2, Modesto 1, Turlock 1, Fillmore 2, Ventura 6, Yolo County 2, Davis 1, Woodland 11, Yuba County 2, California 1.*

Mumps

357 cases: Alameda County 6, Albany 1, Berkeley 16, Livermore 2, Oakland 20, San Leandro 1, Colusa County 2, El Cerrito 1, El Dorado County 1, Placerville 1, Fresno County 1, Fresno 2, Inyo County 1, Kern County 2, Bakersfield 1, Taft 1, Los Angeles County 25, Alhambra 4, Burbank 1, Compton 1, Culver City 1, Glendale 14, Glendora 4, Long Beach 3, Los Angeles 39, Monrovia 1, Pasadena 2, Pomona 2, San Fernando 1, San Gabriel 1, Santa Monica 2, Lynwood 2, Maywood 1, South Gate 1, Marin County 11, Mill Valley 3, Sausalito 1, Mariposa County 6, Merced County 1, Monterey 1, Salinas 1, Napa 2, Orange County 3, Banning 1, Riverside 1, Sacramento 14, Colton 3, Ontario 1, San Bernardino 1, San Diego County 7, San Diego 6, San Francisco 21, San Joaquin County 3, Stockton 26, Tracy 2, San Luis Obispo County 2, San Luis Obispo 2, Hillsborough 1, San Mateo 2, Santa Barbara County 1, Santa Clara County 23, Palo Alto 6, San Jose 8, Shasta County 3, Redding 1, Santa Rosa 1, Modesto 3, Tehama County 2, Tulare County 5, Yolo County 4, Woodland 5, Yuba County 8, California 1.*

Pneumonia (Lobar)

29 cases: Alameda County 1, Oakland 3, Antioch 1, Lake

* Cases charged to "California" represent patients ill before entering the state or those who contracted their illness traveling about the state throughout the incubation period of the disease. These cases are not chargeable to any one locality.

County 1, Los Angeles County 7, La Verne 1, Long Beach 2, Los Angeles 3, South Gate 2, Bell 1, San Clemente 1, San Diego County 2, San Diego 1, San Francisco 2, Fillmore 1.

Scarlet Fever

112 cases: Berkeley 1, Oakland 2, Butte County 2, Oroville 1, Fresno 2, Kern County 2, Delano 4, Maricopa 1, Los Angeles County 14, Azusa 1, Glendale 2, Huntington Park 1, Long Beach 2, Los Angeles 22, Pomona 2, Santa Monica 2, Maywood 1, Marin County 2, Mariposa County 1, Modoc County 2, Alturas 7, La Habra 1, Roseville 1, Riverside County 1, Corona 1, Riverside 2, Sacramento 3, Ontario 1, San Bernardino 1, San Diego 1, San Francisco 5, San Joaquin County 1, Stockton 5, Santa Clara County 5, San Jose 2, Shasta County 1, Solano County 2, Stanislaus County 1, Modesto 1, Tehama County 1, Yolo County 1, California 1.*

Smallpox

13 cases: Butte County 3, Los Angeles County 2, Pomona 4, Riverside County 1, Elsinore 1, Ontario 1, Lodi 1.

Typhoid Fever

4 cases: San Bernardino 1, San Joaquin County 1, Tulare County 1, California 1.*

Whooping Cough

153 cases: Alameda County 1, Albany 7, Kern County 16, Los Angeles County 13, Burbank 1, Glendale 1, Long Beach 10, Los Angeles 31, Montebello 3, San Fernando 1, Whittier 2, Lynwood 1, Orange County 4, La Habra 2, Riverside County 1, Corona 2, Riverside 1, Sacramento 2, San Bernardino 3, San Diego County 6, San Diego 19, San Francisco 7, San Joaquin County 2, Stockton 2, Santa Barbara 2, Santa Rosa 2, Modesto 1, Tulare County 2, Yuba County 8.

Meningitis (Epidemic)

2 cases: Fresno 1, Kern County 1.

Dysentery (Amoebic)

3 cases: San Diego 1, San Francisco 1, Sonoma 1.

Dysentery (Bacillary)

21 cases: Fresno County 2, Kern County 2, Los Angeles County 2, Los Angeles 2, Santa Barbara 2, Sonoma County 11.

Ophthalmia Neonatorum

3 cases: Los Angeles 1, Modoc County 1, Oxnard 1.

Poliomyelitis

14 cases: Fresno County 2, Kern County 1, Los Angeles 6, Riverside County 1, San Bernardino 1, San Diego 1, Ventura County 1, Santa Paula 1.

Trachoma

3 cases: San Fernando 1, Modoc County 1, Alturas 1.

Food Poisoning

57 cases: Monterey County 28, Monterey 11, Pacific Grove 1, Anaheim 5, San Francisco 6, Sonoma County 6.

Undulant Fever

4 cases: Los Angeles 1, Roseville 1, Santa Maria 1, Tehama County 1.

Tularemia

1 case: Delano.

Coccidioid Granuloma

2 cases: Fresno County 1, Kern County 1.

Rabies (Animal)

77 cases: Kern County 45, Bakersfield 15, Los Angeles County 5, Hermosa 1, Los Angeles 7, Bell 1, Orange County 1, San Francisco 1, San Joaquin County 1.

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